



Home > Chelmsford Independent > Opinion & Letters >  RSS Feed

## School Committee must preserve excellence

By Christina Walsh  
Thursday, March 30, 2006

The financial and educational landscape in Chelmsford has changed in recent years due to reduced state aid and slow local revenue growth. Rising costs have made it more and more difficult to provide school and municipal services. The comprehensive challenge to a School Committee member now and in the future is to preserve the excellent schools we have amid this landscape.

More specifically, all of our schools need to remain open to maintain educational quality for all students in our system. In addition, new and creative ideas must be brought to the table. A School Committee member needs to lobby for increased state aid, work with town officials to develop new ways to generate additional local revenue, budget responsibly, and hire and evaluate a qualified superintendent. I am that Committee Member.

As a member of the Chelmsford School Committee I will continue the efforts begun by our current School Committee and the Initiative for Local Aid to lobby the commonwealth for Chapter 70 reform and an increase in local funding. Chelmsford experienced a 20 percent cut in Chapter 70 education funding in FY03, totaling \$1.65 million. As of FY 06, Chelmsford is 16.6 percent less than the FY 03 level. The Chapter 70 education funding formula is outdated and does not distribute education aid fairly.

On March 10, I visited the State House for a second time to submit testimony to the House and Senate Budget Committee urging them to fund Chapter 70 reform and increase local aid to Chelmsford. The wheels of government move slowly. Chelmsford may not see Chapter 70 reform this year. However, these lobbying efforts offer a substantial long-term benefit. We cannot give up! As a School Committee member, I will continue to put my words into action and support our legislators and citizens in their efforts to bring more tax dollars back to Chelmsford through Chapter 70, lottery money and SBA reimbursement.

The School Committee must also work with town officials to support creative ways to generate local revenue. The brainstorming process initiated by a cross-disciplinary committee of School Committee members, selectmen, and Finance Committee members must continue. The School Committee can also reach out to the business community to help expand educational philanthropy in Chelmsford. As a past PTO president, I know that the business community has been outstanding in lending its time and talents to the schools. School Committee members can encourage businesses to work with such organizations as the Chelmsford Schools Foundation, a group formed by parents to raise money for education, and the Arts and Technology Fund. Business can be an effective partner with our schools in generating revenue to fund excellent education. I encourage our community to support our businesses through utilizing local services.







Currently, our school budget is very lean. According to the Department of Education, in FY 04, Chelmsford spent \$7,196 per pupil which was \$1,396 less than the state average. A report compiled for Chelmsford by Municipal Benchmarking LLC, stated that Chelmsford spent only \$7,196 per pupil in FY 04 while towns similar to Chelmsford spent \$7,853.50 per pupil. Our school department has done an excellent job educating our students with less. However, we have reached a crossroads where continued cuts could seriously jeopardize education.

Over the next five years, the School Committee must be fiscally responsible and save money where possible yet continue to maintain educational quality. When new revenue becomes available, we need to invest in our educators and our schools to continue to improve education. Establishing clear priorities now will help address the current budget issues and ensure the responsible and effective use of new money. Our children are required to meet the high standards of the Massachusetts



Christina Walsh (Courtesy photo)

### Herald Interactive Tools

-  [Recent articles](#)
-  [E-mail article to a friend](#)
-  [View graphic version](#)
-  [Get RSS feed](#)
-  [Search site](#)
-  [Sign up for home delivery](#)

Curriculum Frameworks and the Federal No Child Left Behind Act; we must provide them with the tools to succeed.

The School Committee needs to be proactive during the budgeting process and avoid working in crisis mode. I advocate that the school department and School Committee change to a budgeting approach where the schools determine how much money they need to provide quality education and submit that figure to the town manager. All Chelmsford municipal departments operate in this fashion and the school department should follow the same model. The School Committee and superintendent would then work with the town manager and Finance Committee to determine how this budget will fit within the town's financial picture. This process should be ongoing year round so that everyone is on the same page and there are no surprises.






The School Committee will be tasked with hiring a highly qualified superintendent. It is imperative that the next superintendent be an outstanding educator as well as a skillful budget manager who can guide our schools into the next decade. I would like to see a candidate who wants to make a long-term investment in our schools and will reach out to the greater community. According to the Education Reform Act of 1993, the superintendent is responsible for running our schools while the School Committee acts in a supervisory capacity. The School Committee must ensure that our superintendent is effectively performing in that role and meeting the goals and priorities the School Committee has set for our schools.

I possess the qualities to be an effective School Committee member. Through my experience as a licensed social worker, software engineer, Town Meeting Representative and member of many school boards, I have proven that I can be an effective leader, problem-solver and advocate. The needs of our community are best served by a School Committee member who brings a broad range of skills and balance to the decision-making process and who provides diversity to our School Committee. A School Committee member must be more than a team member; she needs to be a team-player, as well as, a partner to fellow committee members, town officials and residents. I have the knowledge and communication skills necessary for the job.

I am the School Committee candidate who has been actively involved serving our schools and our town for the last seven years. I am deeply committed and will hit the ground running when I am elected to the School Committee. Please cast your vote for Christina Walsh - School Committee on April 4.

For more information about my extensive involvement in our schools, you can reach me at 978-256-1688 or visit my Web site at [www.christinawalsh.org](http://www.christinawalsh.org).

#### Recent articles

-  [Youth Hockey: Squirt 3 squad wins fourth consecutive contest](#)
-  [Hoopfest: Shooting stars in Chelmsford](#)
-  [All-Sports Experience returns to Chelmsford](#)
-  [Chelmsford Baseball Academy coming soon](#)
-  [Instant replay will be used for high school sports](#)

#### Today's most read Town Online articles Updated 6:45 AM ET

1. [Vito Citino Jr., Hairstylist](#)(189)
2. [Lillian O. Gagne, Assembler](#)(112)
3. [Wreck injures two local women](#)(84)
4. [A new era](#)(79)
5. [From the Town Hall to the Muddy River waters, this man has his band](#)(73)

Search the site

Enter Keywords  all  relevance  Go



Enterprise-level broadband service provided by **Expedient**: America's Largest All-Ethernet Network

Wireless broadband ser  
**Towerstream**

[ [contact us](#) ] :: [ [print advertising](#) ] :: [ [online advertising](#) ] :: [ [Browser Upgrade](#) ] :: [ [Jobs](#) ]

**Order Home Delivery Online:** [Weekly papers](#) [Daily papers](#) or call **1.800.982.4023**

© Copyright of CNC and Herald Interactive Advertising Systems, Inc.

No portion of townonline.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)

bh.heraldinteractive.com: 0.826657:Thu, 30 Mar 2006 11:51:14 GMT